

Orczy Emmuska Orczy Baroness

Lord Tony's Wife: An Adventure of the Scarlet Pimpernel



Emmuska Orczy
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**PROLOGUE
NANTES, 1789**

I

"Tyrant! tyrant! tyrant!"

It was Pierre who spoke, his voice was hardly raised above a murmur, but there was such an intensity of passion expressed in his face, in the fingers of his hand which closed slowly and convulsively as if they were clutching the throat of a struggling viper, there was so much hate in those muttered words, so much power, such compelling and awesome determination that an ominous silence fell upon the village lads and the men who sat

with him in the low narrow room of the auberge des Trois Vertus.

Even the man in the tattered coat and threadbare breeches, who – perched upon the centre table – had been haranguing the company on the subject of the Rights of Man, paused in his peroration and looked down on Pierre half afraid of that fierce flame of passionate hate which his own words had helped to kindle.

The silence, however, had only lasted a few moments, the next Pierre was on his feet, and a cry like that of a bull in a slaughter-house escaped his throat.

"In the name of God!" he shouted, "let us cease all that senseless talking. Haven't we planned enough and talked enough to satisfy our puling consciences? The time has come to strike, mes amis, to strike I say, to strike at those cursed aristocrats, who have made us what we are – ignorant, wretched, downtrodden – senseless clods to work our fingers to the bone, our bodies till they break so that they may wallow in their pleasures and their luxuries! Strike, I say!" he reiterated while his eyes glowed and his breath came and went through his throat with a hissing sound. "Strike! as the men and women struck in Paris on that great day in July. To them the Bastille stood for tyranny, and they struck at it as they would at the head of a tyrant – and the tyrant cowered, cringed, made terms – he was frightened at the wrath of the people! That is what happened in Paris! That is what must happen in Nantes. The château of the duc de Kernogan is our Bastille! Let us strike at it to-night, and if the arrogant aristocrat

resists, we'll raze his house to the ground. The hour, the day, the darkness are all propitious. The arrangements hold good. The neighbours are ready. Strike, I say!"

He brought his hard fist crashing down upon the table, so that mugs and bottles rattled: his enthusiasm had fired all his hearers: his hatred and his lust of revenge had done more in five minutes than all the tirades of the agitators sent down from Paris to instil revolutionary ideas into the slow-moving brains of village lads.

"Who will give the signal?" queried one of the older men quietly.

"I will!" came a lusty response from Pierre.

He strode to the door, and all the men jumped to their feet, ready to follow him, dragged into this hot-headed venture by the mere force of one man's towering passion. They followed Pierre like sheep – sheep that have momentarily become intoxicated – sheep that have become fierce – a strange sight truly – and yet one that the man in the tattered coat who had done so much speechifying lately, watched with eager interest and presently related with great wealth of detail to M. de Mirabeau the champion of the people.

"It all came about through the death of a pair of pigeons," he said.

The death of the pigeons, however, was only the spark which set all these turbulent passions ablaze. They had been smouldering for half a century, and had been ready to burst into flames for the past decade.

Antoine Melun, the wheelwright, who was to have married Louise, Pierre's sister, had trapped a pair of pigeons in the woods of M. le duc de Kernogan. He had done it to assert his rights as a man – he did not want the pigeons. Though he was a poor man, he was no poorer than hundreds of peasants for miles around. but he paid imposts and taxes until every particle of profit which he gleaned from his miserable little plot of land went into the hands of the collectors, whilst M. le duc de Kernogan paid not one sou towards the costs of the State, and he had to live on what was left of his own rye and wheat after M. le duc's pigeons had had their fill of them.

Antoine Melun did not want to eat the pigeons which he had trapped, but he desired to let M. le duc de Kernogan know that God and Nature had never intended all the beasts and birds of the woods to be the exclusive property of one man, rather than another. So he trapped and killed two pigeons and M. le duc's head-bailiff caught him in the act of carrying those pigeons home.

Whereupon Antoine was arrested for poaching and thieving: he was tried at Nantes under the presidency of M. le duc de Kernogan, and ten minutes ago, while the man in the tattered coat was declaiming to a number of peasant lads in the coffee-room of the auberge des Trois Vertus on the subject of their rights as men and citizens, some one brought the news that Antoine Melun had just been condemned to death and would be hanged on the morrow.

That was the spark which had fanned Pierre Adet's hatred of the aristocrats to a veritable conflagration: the news of Antoine Melun's fate was the bleat which rallied all those human sheep around their leader. For Pierre had naturally become their leader because his hatred of M. le duc was more tangible, more powerful than theirs. Pierre had had more education than they. His father, Jean Adet the miller, had sent him to a school in Nantes, and when Pierre came home M. le curé of Vertou took an interest in him and taught him all he knew himself – which was not much – in the way of philosophy and the classics. But later on Pierre took to reading the writings of M. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and soon knew the *Contrat Social* almost by heart. He had also read the articles in M. Marat's newspaper *L'ami du Peuple!* and, like Antoine Melun, the wheelwright, he had got it into his head that it was not God, nor yet Nature who had intended one man to starve while another gorged himself on all the good things of this world.

He did not, however, speak of these matters, either to his father or to his sister or to M. le curé, but he brooded over them, and when the price of bread rose to four sous he muttered curses against M. le duc de Kernogan, and when famine prices ruled throughout the district those curses became overt threats; and by the time that the pinch of hunger was felt in Vertou Pierre's passion of fury against the duc de Kernogan had turned to a frenzy of hate against the entire noblesse of France.

Still he said nothing to his father, nothing to his mother and

sister. But his father knew. Old Jean would watch the storm-clouds which gathered on Pierre's lowering brow; he heard the muttered curses which escaped from Pierre's lips whilst he worked for the liege-lord whom he hated. But Jean was a wise man and knew how useless it is to put out a feeble hand in order to stem the onrush of a torrent. He knew how useless are the words of wisdom from an old man to quell the rebellious spirit of the young.

Jean was on the watch. And evening after evening when the work on the farm was done, Pierre would sit in the small low room of the auberge with other lads from the village talking, talking of their wrongs, of the arrogance of the aristocrats, the sins of M. le duc and his family, the evil conduct of the King and the immorality of the Queen: and men in ragged coats and tattered breeches came in from Nantes, and even from Paris, in order to harangue these village lads and told them yet further tales of innumerable wrongs suffered by the people at the hands of the aristos, and stuffed their heads full of schemes for getting even once and for all with those men and women who fattened on the sweat of the poor and drew their luxury from the hunger and the toil of the peasantry.

Pierre sucked in these harangues through every pore: they were meat and drink to him. His hate and passions fed upon these effusions till his whole being was consumed by a maddening desire for reprisals, for vengeance – for the lust of triumph over those whom he had been taught to fear.

And in the low, narrow room of the auberge the fevered heads of village lads were bent together in conclave, and the ravings and shoutings of a while ago were changed to whisperings and low murmurings behind barred doors and shuttered windows. Men exchanged cryptic greetings when they met in the village street, enigmatical signs passed between them while they worked: strangers came and went at dead of night to and from the neighbouring villages. M. le duc's overseers saw nothing, heard nothing, guessed nothing. M. le curé saw much and old Jean Adet guessed a great deal, but they said nothing, for nothing then would have availed.

Then came the catastrophe.

II

Pierre pushed open the outer door of the auberge des Trois Vertus and stepped out under the porch. A gust of wind caught him in the face. The night, so the chronicles of the time tell us, was as dark as pitch: on ahead lay the lights of the city flickering in the gale: to the left the wide tawny ribbon of the river wound its turbulent course toward the ocean, the booming of the waters swollen by the recent melting of the snow sounded like the weird echoes of invisible cannons far away.

Without hesitation Pierre advanced. His little troop followed him in silence. They were a little sobered now that they came out into the open and that the fumes of cider and of hot, perspiring

humanity no longer obscured their vision or inflamed their brain.

They knew whither Pierre was going. It had all been pre-arranged – throughout this past summer, in the musty parlour of the auberge, behind barred doors and shuttered windows – all they had to do was to follow Pierre, whom they had tacitly chosen as their leader. They walked on behind him, their hands buried in the pockets of their thin, tattered breeches, their heads bent forward against the fury of the gale.

Pierre made straight for the mill – his home – where his father lived and where Louise was even now crying her eyes out because Antoine Melun, her sweetheart, had been condemned to be hanged for killing two pigeons.

At the back of the mill was the dwelling house and beyond it a small farmery, for Jean Adet owned a little bit of land and would have been fairly well off if the taxes had not swallowed up all the money that he made out of the sale of his rye and his hay. Just here the ground rose sharply to a little hillock which dominated the flat valley of the Loire and commanded a fine view over the more distant villages.

Pierre skirted the mill and without looking round to see if the others followed him he struck squarely to the right up a narrow lane bordered by tall poplars, and which led upwards to the summit of the little hillock around which clustered the tumble-down barns of his father's farmery.

The gale lashed the straight, tall stems of the poplars until they bent nearly double, and each tiny bare twig sighed and whispered

as if in pain. Pierre strode on and the others followed in silence. They were chilled to the bone under their scanty clothes, but they followed on with grim determination, set teeth, and anger and hate seething in their hearts.

The top of the rising ground was reached. It was pitch dark, and the men when they halted fell up against one another trying to get a foothold on the sodden ground. But Pierre seemed to have eyes like a cat. He only paused one moment to get his bearings, then – still without a word – he set to work. A large barn and a group of small circular straw ricks loomed like solid masses out of the darkness – black, silhouetted against the black of the stormy sky. Pierre turned toward the barn: those of his comrades who were in the forefront of the small crowd saw him disappearing inside one of those solid shadowy masses that looked so ghostlike in the night.

Anon those who watched and who happened to be facing the interior of the barn saw sparks from a tinder flying in every direction: the next moment they could see Pierre himself quite clearly. He was standing in the middle of the barn and intent on lighting a roughly-fashioned torch with his tinder: soon the resin caught a spark and Pierre held the torch inclined toward the ground so that the flames could lick their way up the shaft. The flickering light cast a weird glow and deep grotesque shadows upon the face and figure of the young man. His hair, lanky and dishevelled, fell over his eyes; his mouth and jaw, illumined from below by the torch, looked unnaturally large, and showed his

teeth gleaming white, like the fangs of a beast of prey. His shirt was torn open at the neck, and the sleeves of his coat were rolled up to the elbow. He seemed not to feel either the cold from without or the scorching heat of the flaming torch in his hand. But he worked deliberately and calmly, without haste or febrile movements: grim determination held his excitement in check.

At last his work was done. The men who had pressed forward, in order to watch him, fell back as he advanced, torch in hand. They knew exactly what he was going to do, they had thought it all out, planned it, spoken of it till even their unimaginative minds had visualised this coming scene with absolutely realistic perception. And yet, now that the supreme hour had come, now that they saw Pierre – torch in hand – prepared to give the signal which would set ablaze the seething revolt of the countryside, their heart seemed to stop its beating within their body; they held their breath, their toil-worn hands went up to their throats as if to repress that awful choking sensation which was so like fear.

But Pierre had no such hesitations; if his breath seemed to choke him as it reached his throat, if it escaped through his set teeth with a strange whistling sound, it was because his excitement was that of a hungry beast who had sighted his prey and is ready to spring and devour. His hand did not shake, his step was firm: the gusts of wind caught the flame of his torch till the sparks flew in every direction and scorched his hair and his hands, and while the others recoiled he strode on, to the straw-rick that was nearest.

For one moment he held the torch aloft. There was triumph now in his eyes, in his whole attitude. He looked out into the darkness far away which seemed all the more impenetrable beyond the restricted circle of flickering torchlight. It seemed as if he would wrest from that inky blackness all the secrets which it hid – all the enthusiasm, the excitement, the passions, the hatred which he would have liked to set ablaze as he would the straw-ricks anon.

"Are you ready, mes amis?" he called.

"Aye! aye!" they replied – not gaily, not lustily, but calmly and under their breath.

One touch of the torch and the dry straw began to crackle; a gust of wind caught the flame and whipped it into energy; it crept up the side of the little rick like a glowing python that wraps its prey in its embrace. Another gust of wind, and the flame leapt joyously up to the pinnacle of the rick, and sent forth other tongues to lick and to lick, to enfold the straw, to devour, to consume.

But Pierre did not wait to see the consummation of his work of destruction. Already with a few rapid strides he had reached his father's second straw-rick, and this too he set alight, and then another and another, until six blazing furnaces sent their lurid tongues of flames, twisting and twirling, writhing and hissing through the stormy night.

Within the space of two minutes the whole summit of the hillock seemed to be ablaze, and Pierre, like a god of fire, torch

in hand, seemed to preside over and command a multitude of ever-spreading flames to his will. Excitement had overmastered him now, the lust to destroy was upon him, and excitement had seized all the others too.

There was shouting and cursing, and laughter that sounded mirthless and forced, and calls to Pierre, and oaths of revenge. Memory, like an evil-intentioned witch, was riding invisibly in the darkness, and she touched each seething brain with her fever-giving wand. Every man had an outrage to remember, an injustice to recall, and strong, brown fists were shaken aloft in the direction of the château de Kernogan, whose lights glimmered feebly in the distance beyond the Loire.

"Death to the tyrant! A la lanterne les aristos! The people's hour has come at last! No more starvation! No more injustice! Equality! Liberty! A mort les aristos!"

The shouts, the curses, the crackling flames, the howling of the wind, the sighing of the trees, made up a confusion of sounds which seemed hardly of this earth; the blazing ricks, the flickering, red light of the flames had finally transformed the little hillock behind the mill into another Brocken on whose summit witches and devils do of a truth hold their revels.

"A moi!" shouted Pierre again, and he threw his torch down upon the ground and once more made for the barn. The others followed him. In the barn were such weapons as these wretched, penniless peasants had managed to collect – scythes, poles, axes, saws, anything that would prove useful for the destruction of the

château de Kernogan and the proposed brow-beating of M. le duc and his family. All the men trooped in in the wake of Pierre. The entire hillock was now a blaze of light – lurid and red and flickering – alternately teased and fanned and subdued by the gale, so that at times every object stood out clearly cut, every blade of grass, every stone in bold relief, and in the ruts and fissures, every tiny pool of muddy water shimmered like strings of fire-opals: whilst at others, a pall of inky darkness, smoke-laden and impenetrable would lie over the ground and erase the outline of farm-buildings and distant mill and of the pushing and struggling mass of humanity inside the barn.

But Pierre, heedless of light and darkness, of heat or of cold, proceeded quietly and methodically to distribute the primitive implements of warfare to this crowd of ignorant men, who were by now over ready for mischief: and with every weapon which he placed in willing hands, he found the right words for willing ears – words which would kindle passion and lust of vengeance most readily where they lay dormant, or would fan them into greater vigour where they smouldered.

"For thee this scythe, Hector Lebrun," he would say to a tall, lanky youth whose emaciated arms and bony hands were stretched with longing toward the bright piece of steel; "remember last year's harvest, the heavy tax thou wert forced to pay, so that not one sou of profit went into thy pocket, and thy mother starved whilst M. le duc and his brood feasted and danced, and shiploads of corn were sunk in the Loire lest

abundance made bread too cheap for the poor!

"For thee this pick-axe, Henri Meunier! Remember the new roof on thy hut, which thou didst build to keep the wet off thy wife's bed, who was crippled with ague – and the heavy impost levied on thee by the tax-collector for this improvement to thy miserable hovel.

"This pole for thee, Charles Blanc! Remember the beating administered to thee by the duc's bailiff for daring to keep a tame rabbit to amuse thy children!

"Remember! Remember, mes amis!" he added exultantly, "remember every wrong you have endured, every injustice, every blow! remember your poverty and his wealth, your crusts of dry bread and his succulent meals, your rags and his silks and velvets, remember your starving children and ailing mother, your care-laden wife and toil-worn daughters! Forget nothing, mes amis, to-night, and at the gates of the château de Kernogan demand of its arrogant owner wrong for wrong and outrage for outrage."

A deafening cry of triumph greeted this peroration, scythes and sickles and axes and poles were brandished in the air and several scores of hands were stretched out to Pierre and clasped in this newly-formed bond of vengeful fraternity.

III

Then it was that with vigorous play of the elbows, Jean Adet, the miller, forced his way through the crowd till he stood face to

face with his son.

"Unfortunate!" he cried, "what is all this? What dost thou propose to do? Whither are ye all going?"

"To Kernogan!" they all shouted in response.

"En avant, Pierre! we follow!" cried some of them impatiently.

But Jean Adet – who was a powerful man despite his years – had seized Pierre by the arm and dragged him to a distant corner of the barn:

"Pierre!" he said in tones of command, "I forbid thee in the name of thy duty and the obedience which thou dost owe to me and to thy mother, to move another step in this hot-headed adventure. I was on the high-road, walking homewards, when that conflagration and the senseless cries of these poor lads warned me that some awful mischief was afoot. Pierre! my son! I command thee to lay that weapon down."

But Pierre – who in his normal state was a dutiful son and sincerely fond of his father – shook himself free from Jean Adet's grasp.

"Father!" he said loudly and firmly, "this is no time for interference. We are all of us men here and know our own minds. What we mean to do to-night we have thought on and planned for weeks and months. I pray you, father, let me be! I am not a child and I have work to do."

"Not a child?" exclaimed the old man as he turned appealingly to the lads who had stood by, silent and sullen during this little

scene. "Not a child? But you are all only children, my lads. You don't know what you are doing. You don't know what terrible consequences this mad escapade will bring upon us all, upon the whole village, aye! and the country-side. Do you suppose for one moment that the château of Kernogan will fall at the mercy of a few ignorant unarmed lads like yourselves? Why! four hundred of you would not succeed in forcing your way even as far as the courtyard of the palace. M. le duc has had wind for some time of your turbulent meetings at the auberge: he has kept an armed guard inside his castle yard for weeks past, a company of artillery with two guns hoisted upon his walls. My poor lads! you are running straight to ruin! Go home, I beg of you! Forget this night's escapade! Nothing but misery to you and yours can result from it."

They listened quietly, if surlily, to Jean Adet's impassioned words. Far be it from their thoughts to flout or to mock him. Paternal authority commanded respect even among the most rough; but they all felt that they had gone too far now to draw back: the savour of anticipated revenge had been too sweet to be forgone quite so readily, and Pierre with his vigorous personality, his glowing eloquence, his compelling power had more influence over them than the sober counsels of prudence and the wise admonitions of old Jean Adet. Not one word was spoken, but with an instinctive gesture every man grasped his weapon more firmly and then turned to Pierre, thus electing him their spokesman.

Pierre too had listened in silence to all that his father said,

striving to hide the burning anxiety which was gnawing at his heart, lest his comrades allowed themselves to be persuaded by the old man's counsels and their ardour be cooled by the wise dictates of prudence. But when Jean Adet had finished speaking, and Pierre saw each man thus grasping his weapon all the more firmly and in silence, a cry of triumph escaped his lips.

"It is all in vain, father," he cried, "our minds are made up. A host of angels from heaven would not bar our way now to victory and to vengeance."

"Pierre!" admonished the old man.

"It is too late, my father," said Pierre firmly, "en avant, lads!"

"Yes! en avant! en avant!" assented some, "we have wasted too much time as it is."

"But, unfortunate lads," admonished the old man, "what are you going to do? – a handful of you – where are you going?"

"We go straight to the cross-roads now, father," said Pierre, firmly. "The firing of your ricks – for which I humbly crave your pardon – is the preconcerted signal which will bring the lads from all the neighbouring villages – from Goulaine and les Sorinières and Doulon and Tourne-Bride to our meeting place. Never you fear! There will be more than four hundred of us and a company of paid soldiers is not like to frighten us. Eh, lads?"

"No! no! en avant!" they shouted and murmured impatiently, "there has been too much talking already and we have wasted precious time."

"Pierre!" entreated the miller.

But no one listened to the old man now. A general movement down the hillock had already begun and Pierre, turning his back on his father, had pushed his way to the front of the crowd and was now leading the way down the slope. Up on the summit the fire was already burning low; only from time to time an imprisoned tongue of flame would dart out of the dying embers and leap fitfully up into the night. A dull red glow illumined the small farmery and the mill and the slowly moving mass of men along the narrow road, whilst clouds of black, dense smoke were tossed about by the gale. Pierre walked with head erect. He ceased to think of his father and he never looked back to see if the others followed him. He knew that they did: like the straw-ricks a while ago, they had become the prey of a consuming fire: the fire of their own passion which had caught them and held them and would not leave them now until their ardour was consumed in victory or defeat.

IV

M. le duc de Kernogan had just finished dinner when Jacques Labrunière, his head-bailiff, came to him with the news that a rabble crowd, composed of the peasantry of Goulaine and Vertou and the neighbouring villages, had assembled at the cross-roads, there held revolutionary speeches, and was even now marching toward the castle still shouting and singing and brandishing a miscellaneous collection of weapons chiefly consisting of scythes

and axes.

"The guard is under arms, I imagine," was M. le duc's comment on this not altogether unforeseen piece of news.

"Everything is in perfect order," replied the head-bailiff coolly, "for the defence of M. le duc and his property – and of Mademoiselle."

M. le duc, who had been lounging in one of the big armchairs in the stately hall of Kernogan, jumped to his feet at these words: his cheeks suddenly pallid, and a look of deadly fear in his eyes.

"Mademoiselle," he said hurriedly, "by G – d, Labrunière, I had forgotten – momentarily – "

"M. le duc?" stammered the bailiff in anxious inquiry.

"Mademoiselle de Kernogan is on her way home – even now – she spent the day with Mme. le Marquise d'Herbignac – she was to return at about eight o'clock... If those devils meet her carriage on the road..."

"There is no cause for anxiety, M. le duc," broke in Labrunière hurriedly. "I will see that half a dozen men get to horse at once and go and meet Mademoiselle and escort her home..."

"Yes ... yes ... Labrunière," murmured the duc, who seemed very much overcome with terror now that his daughter's safety was in jeopardy, "see to it at once. Quick! quick! I shall wax crazy with anxiety."

While Labrunière ran to make the necessary arrangements for an efficient escort for Mademoiselle de Kernogan and gave the sergeant in charge of the posse the necessary directions, M. le

duc remained motionless, huddled up in the capacious armchair, his head buried in his hand, shivering in front of the huge fire which burned in the monumental hearth, himself the prey of nameless, overwhelming terror.

He knew – none better – the appalling hatred wherewith he and all his family and belongings were regarded by the local peasantry. Astride upon his manifold rights – feudal, territorial, seignorial rights – he had all his life ridden roughshod over the prejudices, the miseries, the undoubted rights of the poor people, who were little better than serfs in the possession of the high and mighty duc de Kernogan. He also knew – none better – that gradually, very gradually it is true, but with unerring certainty, those same downtrodden, ignorant, miserable and half-starved peasants were turning against their oppressors, that riots and outrages had occurred in many rural districts in the North and that the insidious poison of social revolution was gradually creeping toward the South and West, and had already infected the villages and small townships which were situated quite unpleasantly close to Nantes and to Kernogan.

For this reason he had kept a company of artillery at his own expense inside the precincts of his château, and with the aristocrat's open contempt for this peasantry which it had not yet learned to fear, he had disdained to take further measures for the repression of local gatherings, and would not pay the village rabble the compliment of being afraid of them in any way.

But with his daughter Yvonne in the open roadway on the

very night when an assembly of that same rabble was obviously bent on mischief, matters became very serious. Insult, outrage or worse might befall the proud aristocrat's only child, and knowing that from these people, whom she had been taught to look upon as little better than beasts, she could expect neither mercy nor chivalry, the duc de Kernogan within his unassailable castle felt for his daughter's safety the most abject, the most deadly fear which hath ever unnerved any man.

Labrunière a few minutes later did his best to reassure his master.

"I have ordered the men to take the best horses out of the stables, M. le duc," he said, "and to cut across the fields toward la Gramoire so as to intercept Mademoiselle's coach ere it reach the cross-roads. I feel confident that there is no cause for alarm," he added emphatically.

"Pray God you are right, Labrunière," murmured the duc feebly. "Do you know how strong the rabble crowd is?"

"No, Monseigneur, not exactly. Camille the under-bailiff, who brought me the news, was riding homewards across the meadows about an hour ago when he saw a huge conflagration which seemed to come from the back of Adet's mill: the whole sky has been lit up by a lurid light for the past hour, and I fancied myself that Adet's straw must be on fire. But Camille pushed his horse up the rising ground which culminates at Adet's farmery. It seems that he heard a great deal of shouting which did not seem to be accompanied by any attempt at putting out the fire.

So he dismounted and led his horse round the hillock skirting Adet's farm buildings so that he should not be seen. Under cover of darkness he heard and saw the old miller with his son Pierre engaged in distributing scythes, poles and axes to a crowd of youngsters and haranguing them wildly all the time. He also heard Pierre Adet speak of the conflagration as a preconcerted signal, and say that he and his mates would meet the lads of the neighbouring villages at the cross-roads ... and that four hundred of them would then march on Kernogan and pillage the castle."

"Bah!" quoth M. le duc in a voice hoarse with execration and contempt, "a lot of oafs who will give the hangman plenty of trouble to-morrow. As for that Adet and his son, they shall suffer for this ... I can promise them that... If only Mademoiselle were home!" he added with a heartrending sigh.

V

Indeed, had M. le duc de Kernogan been gifted with second sight, the agony of mind which he was enduring would have been aggravated an hundredfold. At the very moment when the head-bailiff was doing his best to reassure his liege-lord as to the safety of Mlle. de Kernogan, her coach was speeding along from the château of Herbignac toward those same cross-roads where a couple of hundred hot-headed peasant lads were planning as much mischief as their unimaginative minds could conceive.

The fury of the gale had in no way abated, and now a heavy

rain was falling – a drenching, sopping rain which in the space of half an hour had added five centimetres to the depth of the mud on the roads, and had in that same space of time considerably damped the enthusiasm of some of the poor lads. Three score or so had assembled from Goulaine, two score from les Sorinières, some three dozen from Doulon: they had rallied to the signal in hot haste, gathered their scythes and spades, very eager and excited, and had reached the cross-roads which were much nearer to their respective villages than to Jean Adet's farm and the mill, even while the old man was admonishing his son and the lads of Vertou on the summit of the blazing hillock. Here they had spent half an hour in cooling their heels and their tempers under the drenching rain – wet to the skin – fuming and fretting at the delay.

But even so – damped in ardour and chilled to the marrow – they were still a dangerous crowd and prudence ought to have dictated to Mademoiselle de Kernogan the wiser course of ordering her coachman Jean-Marie to head his horses back toward Herbignac the moment that the outrider reported that a mob, armed with scythes, spades and axes, held the cross-roads, and that it would be dangerous for the coach to advance any further.

Already for the past few minutes the sound of loud shouting had been heard even above the tramp of the horses and the clatter of the coach. Jean-Marie had pulled up and sent one of the outriders on ahead to see what was amiss: the man returned

with very unpleasant tidings – in his opinion it certainly would be dangerous to go any further. The mob appeared bent on mischief: he had heard threats and curses all levelled against M. le duc de Kernogan – the conflagration up at Vertou was evidently a signal which would bring along a crowd of malcontents from all the neighbouring villages. He was for turning back forthwith. But Mademoiselle put her head out of the window just then and asked what was amiss. On hearing that Jean-Marie and the postilion and outriders were inclined to be afraid of a mob of peasant lads who had assembled at the cross-roads, and were apparently threatening to do mischief, she chided them for their cowardice.

"Jean-Marie," she called scornfully to the old coachman, who had been in her father's service for close on half a century, "do you really mean to tell me that you are afraid of that rabble!"

"Why no! Mademoiselle, so please you," replied the old man, nettled in his pride by the taunt, "but the temper of the peasantry round here has been ugly of late, and 'tis your safety I have got to guard."

"'Tis my commands you have got to obey," retorted Mademoiselle with a gay little laugh which mitigated the peremptoriness of her tone. "If my father should hear that there's trouble on the road he will die of anxiety if I do not return: so whip up the horses, Jean-Marie. No one will dare to attack the coach."

"But Mademoiselle – " remonstrated the old man.

"Ah ça!" she broke in more impatiently, "am I to be openly

disobeyed? Best join that rabble, Jean-Marie, if you have no respect for my commands."

Thus twitted by Mademoiselle's sharp tongue, Jean-Marie could not help but obey. He tried to peer into the distance through the veil of blinding rain which beat against his face and stung the horses to restlessness. But the light from the coach lanterns prevented his seeing clearly into the darkness beyond. Still it seemed to him that on ahead a dense and solid mass was moving toward the coach, also that the sound of shouting and of excited humanity was considerably nearer than it had been before. No doubt the mob had perceived the lights of the coach, and was even now making towards it, with what intent Jean-Marie divined all too accurately.

But he had his orders, and, though he was an old and trusted servant, disobedience these days was not even to be thought of. So he did as he was bid. He whipped up his horses, which were high-spirited and answered to the lash with a bound and a plunge forward. Mlle. de Kernogan leaned back on the cushions of the coach. She was satisfied that Jean-Marie had done as he was told, and she was not in the least afraid.

But less than five minutes later she had a rude awakening. The coach gave a terrific lurch. The horses reared and plunged, there was a deafening clamour all around: men were shouting and cursing: there was the clash of wood and iron and the cracking of whips: the tramp of horses' hoofs in the soft ground, and the dull thud of human bodies falling in the mud, followed by loud cries

of pain. There was the sudden crash of broken glass, the coach lanterns had been seized and broken: it seemed to Yvonne de Kernogan that out of the darkness faces distorted with fury were peering at her through the window-panes. But through all the confusion, the coach kept moving on. Jean-Marie stuck to his post, as did also the postilion and the four outriders, and with whip and tongue they urged their horses to break through the crowd regardless of human lives, knocking and trampling down men and lads heedless of curses and blasphemies which were hurled on them and on the occupants of the coach, whoever they might be.

The next moment, however, the coach came to a sudden halt, and a wild cry of triumph drowned the groans of the injured and the dying.

"Kernogan! Kernogan!" was shouted from every side.

"Adet! Adet!"

"You limbs of Satan," cried Jean-Marie, "you'll rue this night's work and weep tears of blood for the rest of your lives. Let me tell you that! Mademoiselle is in the coach. When M. le duc hears of this, there will be work for the hangman..."

"Mademoiselle in the coach," broke in a hoarse voice with a rough tone of command. "Let's look at her..."

"Aye! Aye! let's have a look at Mademoiselle," came with a volley of objurgations and curses from the crowd.

"You devils – you would dare?" protested Jean-Marie.

Within the coach Yvonne de Kernogan hardly dared to

breathe. She sat bolt upright, her cape held tightly round her shoulders: her eyes dilated now with excitement, if not with fear, were fixed upon the darkness beyond the window-panes. She could see nothing, but she *felt* the presence of that hostile crowd who had succeeded in over-powering Jean-Marie and were intent on doing her harm.

But she belonged to a caste which never reckoned cowardice amongst its many faults. During these few moments when she knew that her life hung on the merest thread of chance, she neither screamed nor fainted but sat rigidly still, her heart beating in unison with the agonising seconds which went so fatefully by. And even now, when the carriage door was torn violently open and even through the darkness she discerned vaguely the forms of these avowed enemies close beside her, and anon felt a rough hand seize her wrist, she did not move, but said quite calmly, with hardly a tremor in her voice:

"Who are you? and what do you want?"

An outburst of harsh and ironical laughter came in response.

"Who are we, my fine lady?" said the foremost man in the crowd, he who had seized her wrist and was half in and half out of the coach at this moment, "we are the men who throughout our lives have toiled and starved whilst you and such as you travel in fine coaches and eat your fill. What we want? Why, just the spectacle of such a fine lady as you are being knocked down into the mud just as our wives and daughters are if they happen to be in the way when your coach is passing. Isn't that it, mes amis?"

"Aye! aye!" they replied, shouting lustily. "Into the mud with the fine lady. Out with her, Adet. Let's have a look at Mademoiselle how she will look with her face in the mud. Out with her, quick!"

But the man who was still half in and half out of the coach, and who had hold of Mademoiselle's wrist did not obey his mates immediately. He drew her nearer to him and suddenly threw his rough, begrimed arms round her, and with one hand pulled back her hood, then placing two fingers under her chin, he jerked it up till her face was level with his own.

Yvonne de Kernogan was certainly no coward, but at the loathsome contact of this infuriated and vengeful creature, she was overcome with such a hideous sense of fear that for the moment consciousness almost left her: not completely alas! for though she could not distinguish his face she could feel his hot breath upon her cheeks, she could smell the nauseating odour of his damp clothes, and she could hear his hoarse mutterings as for the space of a few seconds he held her thus close to him in an embrace which to her was far more awesome than that of death.

"And just to punish you, my fine lady," he said in a whisper which sent a shudder of horror right through her, "to punish you for what you are, the brood of tyrants, proud, disdainful, a budding tyrant yourself, to punish you for every misery my mother and sister have had to endure, for every luxury which you have enjoyed, I will kiss you on the lips and the cheeks and just between your white throat and chin and never as long as you live

if you die this night or live to be an hundred will you be able to wash off those kisses showered upon you by one who hates and loathes you – a miserable peasant whom you despise and who in your sight is lower far than your dogs."

Yvonne, with eyes closed, hardly breathed, but through the veil of semi-consciousness which mercifully wrapped her senses, she could still hear those awful words, and feel the pollution of those loathsome kisses with which – true to his threat – this creature – half man, wholly devil, whom she could not see, but whom she hated and feared as she would Satan himself – now covered her face and throat.

After that she remembered nothing more. Consciousness mercifully forsook her altogether. When she recovered her senses, she was within the precincts of the castle: a confused murmur of voices reached her ears, and her father's arms were round her. Gradually she distinguished what was being said: she gathered the threads of the story which Jean-Marie and the postilion and outriders were hastily unravelling in response to M. le duc's commands.

These men of course knew nothing of the poignant little drama which had been enacted inside the coach. All they knew was that they had been surrounded by a rough crowd – a hundred or so strong – who brandished scythes and spades, that they had made valiant efforts to break through the crowd by whipping up their horses, but that suddenly some of those devils more plucky than the others seized the horses by their bits and rendered poor

Jean-Marie quite helpless. He thought then that all would be up with the lot of them and was thinking of scrambling down from his box in order to protect Mademoiselle with his body, and the pistols which he had in the boot, when happily for every one concerned, he heard in the distance – above the clatter which that abominable rabble was making, the hurried tramp of horses. At once he jumped to the conclusion that these could be none other than a company of soldiers sent by M. le duc. This spurred him to a fresh effort, and gave him a new idea. To Carmail the postilion who had a pistol in his holster he gave the peremptory order to fire a shot into the air or into the crowd, Jean-Marie cared not which. This Carmail did, and at once the horses, already maddened by the crowd, plunged and reared wildly, shaking themselves free. Jean-Marie, however, had them well in hand, and from far away there came the cries of encouragement from the advancing horsemen who were bearing down on them full tilt. The next moment there was a general mêlée. Jean-Marie saw nothing save his horses' heads, but the outriders declared that men were trampled down like flies all around, while others vanished into the night.

What happened after that none of the men knew or cared. Jean-Marie galloped his horses all the way to the castle and never drew rein until the precincts were reached.

VI

Had M. de Kernogan had his way and a free hand to mete out retributive justice in the proportion that he desired, there is no doubt that the hangman of Nantes would have been kept exceedingly busy. As it was a number of arrests were effected the following day – half the manhood of the countryside was implicated in the aborted *Jacquerie* and the city prison was not large enough to hold it all.

A court of justice presided over by M. le duc, and composed of half a dozen men who were directly or indirectly in his employ, pronounced summary sentences on the rioters which were to have been carried out as soon as the necessary arrangements for such wholesale executions could be made. Nantes was turned into a city of wailing; peasant-women – mothers, sisters, daughters, wives of the condemned, trooped from their villages into the city, loudly calling on M. le duc for mercy, besieging the improvised court-house, the prison gates, the town residence of M. le duc, the palace of the bishop: they pushed their way into the courtyards and the very corridors of those buildings – flunkys could not cope with them – they fought with fists and elbows for the right to make a direct appeal to the liege-lord who had power of life and death over their men.

The municipality of Nantes held aloof from this distressful state of things, and the town councillors, the city functionaries

and their families shut themselves up in their houses in order to avoid being a witness to the heartrending scenes which took place uninterruptedly round the court-house and the prison. The mayor himself was powerless to interfere, but it is averred that he sent a secret courier to Paris to M. de Mirabeau, who was known to be a personal friend of his, with a detailed account of the *Jacquerie* and of the terrible measures of reprisal contemplated by M. le duc de Kernogan, together with an earnest request that pressure from the highest possible quarters be brought to bear upon His Grace so that he should abate something of his vengeful rigours.

Poor King Louis, who in these days was being terrorised by the National Assembly and swept off his feet by the eloquence of M. de Mirabeau, was only too ready to make concessions to the democratic spirit of the day. He also desired his noblesse to be equally ready with such concessions. He sent a personal letter to M. le duc, not only asking him, but commanding him, to show grace and mercy to a lot of misguided peasant lads whose loyalty and adherence – he urged – might be won by a gracious and unexpected act of clemency.

The King's commands could not in the nature of things be disobeyed: the same stroke of the pen which was about to send half a hundred young countrymen to the gallows granted them M. le duc's gracious pardon and their liberty: the only exception to this general amnesty being Pierre Adet, the son of the miller. M. le duc's servants had deposed to seeing him pull open the door of the coach and stand for some time half

in and half out of the carriage, obviously trying to terrorise Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle refused either to corroborate or to deny this statement, but she had arrived fainting at the gate of the château, and she had been very ill ever since. She had sustained a serious shock to her nerves, so the doctor hastily summoned from Paris had averred, and it was supposed that she had lost all recollection of the terrible incidents of that night.

But M. le duc was satisfied that it was Pierre Adet's presence inside the coach which had brought about his daughter's mysterious illness and that heartrending look of nameless horror which had dwelt in her eyes ever since. Therefore with regard to that man M. le duc remained implacable and as a concession to a father's outraged feelings both the mayor of Nantes and the city functionaries accepted Adet's condemnation without a murmur of dissent.

The sentence of death finally passed upon Pierre, the son of Jean Adet, miller of Vertou, could not, however, be executed, for the simple reason that Pierre had disappeared and that the most rigorous search instituted in the neighbourhood and for miles around failed to bring him to justice. One of the outriders who had been in attendance on Mademoiselle on that fateful night declared that when Jean-Marie finally whipped up his horses at the approach of the party of soldiers, Adet fell backwards from the step of the carriage and was run over by the hind wheels and instantly killed. But his body was never found among the score or so which were left lying there in the mud of the road until

the women and old men came to seek their loved ones among the dead.

Pierre Adet had disappeared. But M. le duc's vengeance had need of a prey. The outrage which he was quite convinced had been perpetrated against his daughter must be punished by death – if not by the death of the chief offender, then by that of the one who stood nearest to him. Thus was Jean Adet the miller dragged from his home and cast into prison. Was he not implicated himself in the riots? Camille the bailiff had seen and heard him among the insurgents on the hillock that night. At first it was stated that he would be held as hostage for the reappearance of his son. But Pierre Adet had evidently fled the countryside: he was obviously ignorant of the terrible fate which his own folly had brought upon his father. Many thought that he had gone to seek his fortune in Paris where his talents and erudition would ensure him a good place in the present mad rush for equality amongst all men. Certain it is that he did not return and that with merciless hate and vengeful relentlessness M. le duc de Kernogan had Jean Adet hanged for a supposed crime said to be committed by his son.

Jean Adet died protesting his innocence. But the outburst of indignation and revolt aroused by this crying injustice was swamped by the torrent of the revolution which, gathering force by these very acts of tyranny and of injustice, soon swept innocent and guilty alike into a vast whirlpool of blood and shame and tears.

BOOK ONE: BATH, 1793

CHAPTER I THE MOOR

I

Silence. Loneliness. Desolation.

And the darkness of late afternoon in November, when the fog from the Bristol Channel has laid its pall upon moor and valley and hill: the last grey glimmer of a wintry sunset has faded in the west: earth and sky are wrapped in the gloomy veils of oncoming night. Some little way ahead a tiny light flickers feebly.

"Surely we cannot be far now."

"A little more patience, Mounzeer. Twenty minutes and we be there."

"Twenty minutes, mordieu. And I have ridden since the morning. And you tell me it was not far."

"Not far, Mounzeer. But we be not 'orzemen either of us. We doan't travel very fast."

"How can I ride fast on this heavy beast? And in this *satané* mud. My horse is up to his knees in it. And I am wet – ah! wet

to my skin in this *sacré* fog of yours."

The other made no reply. Indeed he seemed little inclined for conversation: his whole attention appeared to be riveted on the business of keeping in his saddle, and holding his horse's head turned in the direction in which he wished it to go: he was riding a yard or two ahead of his companion, and it did not need any assurance on his part that he was no horseman: he sat very loosely in his saddle, his broad shoulders bent, his head thrust forward, his knees turned out, his hands clinging alternately to the reins and to the pommel with that ludicrous inconsequent gesture peculiar to those who are wholly unaccustomed to horse exercise.

His attitude, in fact, as well as the promiscuous set of clothes which he wore – a labourer's smock, a battered high hat, threadbare corduroys and fisherman's boots – at once suggested the loafer, the do-nothing who hangs round the yards of half-way houses and posting inns on the chance of earning a few coppers by an easy job which does not entail too much exertion on his part and which will not take him too far from his favourite haunts. When he spoke – which was not often – the soft burr in the pronunciation of the sibilants betrayed the Westcountryman.

His companion, on the other hand, was obviously a stranger: high of stature, and broadly built, his wide shoulders and large hands and feet, his square head set upon a short thick neck, all bespoke the physique of a labouring man, whilst his town-made clothes – his heavy caped coat, admirably tailored, his

buckskin breeches and boots of fine leather – suggested, if not absolutely the gentleman, at any rate one belonging to the well-to-do classes. Though obviously not quite so inexperienced in the saddle as the other man appeared to be, he did not look very much at home in the saddle either: he held himself very rigid and upright and squared his shoulders with a visible effort at seeming at ease, like a townsman out for a constitutional on the fashionable promenade of his own city, or a cavalry subaltern but lately emerged from a riding school. He spoke English quite fluently, even colloquially at times, but with a marked Gallic accent.

II

The road along which the two cavaliers were riding was unspeakably lonely and desolate – an offshoot from the main Bath to Weston road. It had been quite a good secondary road once. The accounts of the county administration under date 1725 go to prove that it was completed in that year at considerable expense and with stone brought over for the purpose all the way from Draycott quarries, and for twenty years after that a coach used to ply along it between Chelwood and Redhill as well as two or three carriers, and of course there was all the traffic in connexion with the Stanton markets and the Norton Fairs. But that was nigh on fifty years ago now, and somehow – once the mail-coach was discontinued – it had never seemed worth while

to keep the road in decent repair. It had gone from bad to worse since then, and travelling on it these days either a horse or a foot had become very unpleasant. It was full of ruts and crevasses and knee-deep in mud, as the stranger had very appositely remarked, and the stone parapet which bordered it on either side, and which had once given it such an air of solidity and of value, was broken down in very many places and threatened soon to disappear altogether.

The country round was as lonely and desolate as the road. And that sense of desolation seemed to pervade the very atmosphere right through the darkness which had descended on upland and valley and hill. Though nothing now could be seen through the gloom and the mist, the senses were conscious that even in broad daylight there would be nothing to see. Loneliness dwelt in the air as well as upon the moor. There were no homesteads for miles around, no cattle grazing, no pastures, no hedges, nothing – just arid wasteland with here and there a group of stunted trees or an isolated yew, and tracts of rough, coarse grass not nearly good enough for cattle to eat.

There are vast stretches of upland equally desolate in many parts of Europe – notably in Northern Spain – but in England, where they are rare, they seem to gain an additional air of loneliness through the very life which pulsates in their vicinity. This bit of Somersetshire was one of them in this year of grace 1793. Despite the proximity of Bath and its fashionable life, its gaieties and vitality, distant only a little over twenty miles, and of

Bristol distant less than thirty, it had remained wild and forlorn, almost savage in its grim isolation, primitive in the grandeur of its solitude.

III

The road at the point now reached by the travellers begins to slope in a gentle gradient down to the level of the Chew, a couple of miles further on: it was midway down this slope that the only sign of living humanity could be perceived in that tiny light which glimmered persistently. The air itself under its mantle of fog had become very still, only the water of some tiny moorland stream murmured feebly in its stony bed ere it lost its entity in the bosom of the river far away.

"Five more minutes and we be at th' Bottom Inn," quoth the man who was ahead in response to another impatient ejaculation from his companion.

"If we don't break our necks meanwhile in this confounded darkness," retorted the other, for his horse had just stumbled and the inexperienced rider had been very nearly pitched over into the mud.

"I be as anxious to arrive as you are, Mounzeer," observed the countryman laconically.

"I thought you knew the way," muttered the stranger.

"Ave I not brought you safely through the darkness?" retorted the other; "you was pretty well ztranded at Chelwood, Mounzeer,

or I be much mistaken. Who else would 'ave brought you out 'ere at this time o' night, I'd like to know – and in this weather too? You wanted to get to th' Bottom Inn and didn't know 'ow to zet about it: none o' the gaffers up to Chelwood 'peared eager to 'elp you when I come along. Well, I've brought you to th' Bottom Inn and... Whoa! Whoa! my beauty! Whoa, confound you! Whoa!"

And for the next moment or two the whole of his attention had perforce to be concentrated on the business of sticking to his saddle whilst he brought his fagged-out, ill-conditioned nag to a standstill.

The little glimmer of light had suddenly revealed itself in the shape of a lanthorn hung inside the wooden porch of a small house which had loomed out of the darkness and the fog. It stood at an angle of the road where a narrow lane had its beginnings ere it plunged into the moor beyond and was swallowed up by the all-enveloping gloom. The house was small and ugly; square like a box and built of grey stone, its front flush with the road, its rear flanked by several small outbuildings. Above the porch hung a plain sign-board bearing the legend: "The Bottom Inn" in white letters upon a black ground: to right and left of the porch there was a window with closed shutters, and on the floor above two more windows – also shuttered – completed the architectural features of the Bottom Inn.

It was uncompromisingly ugly and uninviting, for beyond the faint glimmer of the lanthorn only one or two narrow streaks of light filtrated through the chinks of the shutters.

IV

The travellers, after some difference of opinion with their respective horses, contrived to pull up and to dismount without any untoward accident. The stranger looked about him, peering into the darkness. The place indeed appeared dismal and inhospitable enough: its solitary aspect suggested footpads and the abode of cut-throats. The silence of the moor, the pall of mist and gloom that hung over upland and valley sent a shiver through his spine.

"You are sure this is the place?" he queried.

"Can't ye zee the zign?" retorted the other gruffly.

"Can you hold the horses while I go in?"

"I doan't know as 'ow I can, Mounzeer. I've never 'eld two 'orzes all at once. Suppose they was to start kickin' or thought o' runnin' away?"

"Running away, you fool!" muttered the stranger, whose temper had evidently suffered grievously during the weary, cold journey from Chelwood. "I'll break your *satané* head if anything happens to the beasts. How can I get back to Bath save the way I came? Do you think I want to spend the night in this God-forsaken hole?"

Without waiting to hear any further protests from the lout, he turned into the porch and with his riding whip gave three consecutive raps against the door of the inn, followed by two

more. The next moment there was the sound of a rattling of bolts and chains, the door was cautiously opened and a timid voice queried:

"Is it Mounzeer?"

"Pardieu! Who else?" growled the stranger. "Open the door, woman. I am perished with cold."

With an unceremonious kick he pushed the door further open and strode in. A woman was standing in the dimly lighted passage. As the stranger walked in she bobbed him a respectful curtsy.

"It is all right, Mounzeer," she said; "the Captain's in the coffee-room. He came over from Bristol early this afternoon."

"No one else here, I hope," he queried curtly.

"No one, zir. It ain't their hour not yet. You'll 'ave the 'ouse to yourself till after midnight. After that there'll be a bustle, I reckon. Two shiploads come into Watchet last night – brandy and cloth, Mounzeer, so the Captain says, and worth a mint o' money. The pack 'orzes will be through yere in the small hours."

"That's all right, then. Send me in a bite and a mug of hot ale."

"I'll see to it, Mounzeer."

"And stay – have you some sort of stabling where the man can put the two horses up for an hour's rest?"

"Aye, aye, zir."

"Very well then, see to that too: and see that the horses get a feed and a drink and give the man something to eat."

"Very good, Mounzeer. This way, zir. I'll see the man

presently. Straight down the passage, zir. The coffee-room is on the right. The Captain's there, waiting for ye."

She closed the front door carefully, then followed the stranger to the door of the coffee-room. Outside an anxious voice was heard muttering a string of inconsequent and wholly superfluous "Whoa's!" Of a truth the two wearied nags were only too anxious for a little rest.

CHAPTER II

THE BOTTOM INN

I

A man was sitting, huddled up in the ingle-nook of the small coffee-room, sipping hot ale from a tankard which he had in his hand.

Anything less suggestive of a rough sea-faring life than his appearance it would be difficult to conceive; and how he came by the appellation "the Captain" must for ever remain a mystery. He was small and spare, with thin delicate face and slender hands: though dressed in very rough garments, he was obviously ill at ease in them; his narrow shoulders scarcely appeared able to bear the weight of the coarsely made coat, and his thin legs did not begin to fill the big fisherman's boots which reached midway up his lean thighs. His hair was lank and plentifully sprinkled with grey: he wore it tied at the nape of the neck with a silk bow which certainly did not harmonise with the rest of his clothing. A wide-brimmed felt hat something the shape of a sailor's, but with higher crown – of the shape worn by the peasantry in Brittany – lay on the bench beside him.

When the stranger entered he had greeted him curtly,

speaking in French.

The room was inexpressibly stuffy, and reeked of the fumes of stale tobacco, stale victuals and stale beer; but it was warm, and the stranger, stiff to the marrow and wet to the skin, uttered an exclamation of well-being as he turned to the hearth, wherein a bright fire burned cheerily. He had put his hat down when first he entered and had divested himself of his big coat: now he held one foot and then the other to the blaze and tried to infuse new life into his numbed hands.

"The Captain" took scant notice of his comings and goings. He did not attempt to help him off with his coat, nor did he make an effort to add another log to the fire. He sat silent and practically motionless, save when from time to time he took a sip out of his mug of ale. But whenever the new-comer came within his immediate circle of vision he shot a glance at the latter's elegant attire – the well-cut coat, the striped waistcoat, the boots of fine leather – the glance was quick and comprehensive and full of scorn, a flash that lasted only an instant and was at once veiled again by the droop of the flaccid lids which hid the pale, keen eyes.

"When the woman has brought me something to eat and drink," the stranger said after a while, "we can talk. I have a good hour to spare, as those miserable nags must have some rest."

He too spoke in French and with an air of authority, not to say arrogance, which caused "the Captain's" glance of scorn to light up with an added gleam of hate and almost of cruelty. But

he made no remark and continued to sip his ale in silence, and for the next half-hour the two men took no more notice of one another, just as if they had never travelled all those miles and come to this desolate spot for the sole purpose of speaking with one another. During the course of that half-hour the woman brought in a dish of mutton stew, a chunk of bread, a piece of cheese and a jug of spiced ale, and placed them on the table: all of these good things the stranger consumed with an obviously keen appetite. When he had eaten and drunk his fill, he rose from the table, drew a bench into the ingle-nook and sat down so that his profile only was visible to his friend "the Captain."

"Now, citizen Chauvelin," he said with an attempt at ease and familiarity not unmingled with condescension, "I am ready for your news."

II

Chauvelin had winced perceptibly both at the condescension and the familiarity. It was such a very little while ago that men had trembled at a look, a word from him: his silence had been wont to strike terror in quaking hearts. It was such a very little while ago that he had been president of the Committee of Public Safety, all powerful, the right hand of citizen Robespierre, the master sleuth-hound who could track an unfortunate "suspect" down to his most hidden lair, before whose keen, pale eyes the innermost secrets of a soul stood revealed, who guessed at

treason ere it was wholly born, who scented treachery ere it was formulated. A year ago he had with a word sent scores of men, women and children to the guillotine – he had with a sign brought the whole machinery of the ruthless Committee to work against innocent or guilty alike on mere suspicion, or to gratify his own hatred against all those whom he considered to be the enemies of that bloody revolution which he had helped to make. Now his presence, his silence, had not even the power to ruffle the self-assurance of an upstart.

But in the hard school both of success and of failure through which he had passed during the last decade, there was one lesson which Armand once Marquis de Chauvelin had learned to the last letter, and that was the lesson of self-control. He had winced at the other's familiarity, but neither by word nor gesture did he betray what he felt.

"I can tell you," he merely said quite curtly, "all I have to say in far less time than it has taken you to eat and drink, citizen Adet..."

But suddenly, at sound of that name, the other had put a warning hand on Chauvelin's arm, even as he cast a rapid, anxious look all round the narrow room.

"Hush, man!" he murmured hurriedly, "you know quite well that that name must never be pronounced here in England. I am Martin-Roget now," he added, as he shook off his momentary fright with equal suddenness, and once more resumed his tone of easy condescension, "and try not to forget it."

Chauvelin without any haste quietly freed his arm from the other's grasp. His pale face was quite expressionless, only the thin lips were drawn tightly over the teeth now, and a curious hissing sound escaped faintly from them as he said:

"I'll try and remember, citizen, that here in England you are an aristo, the same as all these confounded English whom may the devil sweep into a bottomless sea."

Martin-Roget gave a short, complacent laugh.

"Ah," he said lightly, "no wonder you hate them, citizen Chauvelin. You too were an aristo here in England once – not so very long ago, I am thinking – special envoy to His Majesty King George, what? – until failure to bring one of these *satané* Britishers to book made you ... er ... well, made you what you are now."

He drew up his tall, broad figure as he spoke and squared his massive shoulders as he looked down with a fatuous smile and no small measure of scorn on the hunched-up little figure beside him. It had seemed to him that something in the nature of a threat had crept into Chauvelin's attitude, and he, still flushed with his own importance, his immeasurable belief in himself, at once chose to measure his strength against this man who was the personification of failure and disgrace – this man whom so many people had feared for so long and whom it might not be wise to defy even now.

"No offence meant, citizen Chauvelin," he added with an air of patronage which once more made the other wince. "I had no

wish to wound your susceptibilities. I only desired to give you timely warning that what I do here is no one's concern, and that I will brook interference and criticism from no man."

And Chauvelin, who in the past had oft with a nod sent a man to the guillotine, made no reply to this arrogant taunt. His small figure seemed to shrink still further within itself: and anon he passed his thin, claw-like hand over his face as if to obliterate from its surface any expression which might war with the utter humility wherewith he now spoke.

"Nor was there any offence meant on my part, citizen Martin-Roget," he said suavely. "Do we not both labour for the same end? The glory of the Republic and the destruction of her foes?"

Martin-Roget gave a sigh of satisfaction. The battle had been won: he felt himself strong again – stronger than before through that very act of deference paid to him by the once all-powerful Chauvelin. Now he was quite prepared to be condescending and jovial once again:

"Of course, of course," he said pleasantly, as he once more bent his tall figure to the fire. "We are both servants of the Republic, and I may yet help you to retrieve your past failures, citizen, by giving you an active part in the work I have in hand. And now," he added in a calm, business-like manner, the manner of a master addressing a servant who has been found at fault and is taken into favour again, "let me hear your news."

"I have made all the arrangements about the ship," said Chauvelin quietly.

"Ah! that is good news indeed. What is she?"

"She is a Dutch ship. Her master and crew are all Dutch..."

"That's a pity. A Danish master and crew would have been safer."

"I could not come across any Danish ship willing to take the risks," said Chauvelin dryly.

"Well! And what about this Dutch ship then?"

"She is called the *Hollandia* and is habitually engaged in the sugar trade: but her master does a lot of contraband – more than fair trading, I imagine: anyway, he is willing for the sum you originally named to take every risk and incidentally to hold his tongue about the whole business."

"For two thousand francs?"

"Yes."

"And he will run the *Hollandia* into Le Croisic?"

"When you command."

"And there is suitable accommodation on board her for a lady and her woman?"

"I don't know what you call suitable," said Chauvelin with a sarcastic tone, which the other failed or was unwilling to note, "and I don't know what you call a lady. The accommodation available on board the *Hollandia* will be sufficient for two men and two women."

"And her master's name?" queried Martin-Roget.

"Some outlandish Dutch name," replied Chauvelin. "It is spelt K U Y P E R. The devil only knows how it is pronounced."

"Well! And does Captain K U Y P E R understand exactly what I want?"

"He says he does. The *Hollandia* will put into Portishead on the last day of this month. You and your guests can get aboard her any day after that you choose. She will be there at your disposal, and can start within an hour of your getting aboard. Her master will have all his papers ready. He will have a cargo of West Indian sugar on board – destination Amsterdam, consignee Mynheer van Smeer – everything perfectly straight and square. French aristos, *émigrés* on board on their way to join the army of the Princes. There will be no difficulty in England."

"And none in Le Croisic. The man is running no risks."

"He thinks he is. France does not make Dutch ships and Dutch crews exactly welcome just now, does she?"

"Certainly not. But in Le Croisic and with citizen Adet on board..."

"I thought that name was not to be mentioned here," retorted Chauvelin dryly.

"You are right, citizen," whispered the other, "it escaped me and..."

Already he had jumped to his feet, his face suddenly pale, his whole manner changed from easy, arrogant self-assurance to uncertainty and obvious dread. He moved to the window, trying to subdue the sound of his footsteps upon the uneven floor.

III

"Are you afraid of eavesdroppers, citizen Roget?" queried Chauvelin with a shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"No. There is no one there. Only a lout from Chelwood who brought me here. The people of the house are safe enough. They have plenty of secrets of their own to keep."

He was obviously saying all this in order to reassure himself, for there was no doubt that his fears were on the alert. With a febrile gesture he unfastened the shutters, and pushed them open, peering out into the night.

"Hallo!" he called.

But he received no answer.

"It has started to rain," he said more calmly. "I imagine that lout has found shelter in an outhouse with the horses."

"Very likely," commented Chauvelin laconically.

"Then if you have nothing more to tell me," quoth Martin-Roget, "I may as well think about getting back. Rain or no rain, I want to be in Bath before midnight."

"Ball or supper-party at one of your duchesses?" queried the other with a sneer. "I know them."

To this Martin-Roget vouchsafed no reply.

"How are things at Nantes?" he asked.

"Splendid! Carrier is like a wild beast let loose. The prisons are over-full: the surplus of accused, condemned and suspect fills

the cellars and warehouses along the wharf. Priests and suchlike trash are kept on disused galliots up stream. The guillotine is never idle, and friend Carrier fearing that she might give out – get tired, what? – or break down – has invented a wonderful way of getting rid of shoals of undesirable people at one magnificent swoop. You have heard tell of it no doubt."

"Yes. I have heard of it," remarked the other curtly.

"He began with a load of priests. Requisitioned an old barge. Ordered Baudet the shipbuilder to construct half a dozen portholes in her bottom. Baudet demurred: he could not understand what the order could possibly mean. But Foucaud and Lamberty – Carrier's agents – you know them – explained that the barge would be towed down the Loire and then up one of the smaller navigable streams which it was feared the royalists were preparing to use as a way for making a descent upon Nantes, and that the idea was to sink the barge in midstream in order to obstruct the passage of their army. Baudet, satisfied, put five of his men to the task. Everything was ready on the 16th of last month. I know the woman Pichot, who keeps a small tavern opposite La Sécherie. She saw the barge glide up the river toward the galliot where twenty-five priests of the diocese of Nantes had been living for the past two months in the company of rats and other vermin as noxious as themselves. Most lovely moonlight there was that night. The Loire looked like a living ribbon of silver. Foucaud and Lamberty directed operations, and Carrier had given them full instructions. They tied the calotins up two and

two and transferred them from the galliot to the barge. It seems they were quite pleased to go. Had enough of the rats, I presume. The only thing they didn't like was being searched. Some had managed to secrete silver ornaments about their person when they were arrested. Crucifixes and such like. They didn't like to part with these, it seems. But Foucaud and Lamberty relieved them of everything but the necessary clothing, and they didn't want much of that, seeing whither they were going. Foucaud made a good pile, so they say. Self-seeking, avaricious brute! He'll learn the way to one of Carrier's barges too one day, I'll bet."

He rose and with quick footsteps moved to the table. There was some ale left in the jug which the woman had brought for Martin-Roget a while ago. Chauvelin poured the contents of it down his throat. He had talked uninterruptedly, in short, jerky sentences, without the slightest expression of horror at the atrocities which he recounted. His whole appearance had become transfigured while he spoke. Gone was the urbane manner which he had learnt at courts long ago, gone was the last instinct of the gentleman sunk to proletarianism through stress of circumstances, or financial straits or even political convictions. The erstwhile Marquis de Chauvelin – envoy of the Republic at the Court of St. James' – had become citizen Chauvelin in deed and in fact, a part of that rabble which he had elected to serve, one of that vile crowd of bloodthirsty revolutionaries who had sullied the pure robes of Liberty and of Fraternity by spattering

them with blood. Now he smacked his lips, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and burying his hands in the pockets of his breeches he stood with legs wide apart and a look of savage satisfaction settled upon his pale face. Martin-Roget had made no comment upon the narrative. He had resumed his seat by the fire and was listening attentively. Now while the other drank and paused, he showed no sign of impatience, but there was something in the look of the bent shoulders, in the rigidity of the attitude, in the large, square hands tightly clasped together which suggested the deepest interest and an intentness that was almost painful.

"I was at the woman Pichot's tavern that night," resumed Chauvelin after a while. "I saw the barge – a moving coffin, what? – gliding down stream towed by the galliot and escorted by a small boat. The floating battery at La Samaritaine challenged her as she passed, for Carrier had prohibited all navigation up or down the Loire until further notice. Foucaud, Lamberty, Fouquet and O'Sullivan the armourer were in the boat: they rowed up to the pontoon and Vailly the chief gunner of the battery challenged them once more. However, they had some sort of written authorisation from Carrier, for they were allowed to pass. Vailly remained on guard. He saw the barge glide further down stream. It seems that the moon on that time was hidden by a cloud. But the night was not dark and Vailly watched the barge till she was out of sight. She was towed past Trentemoult and Chantenay into the wide reach of the river just below Cheviré where, as you know, the Loire is nearly two thousand feet wide."

Once more he paused, looking down with grim amusement on the bent shoulders of the other man.

"Well?"

Chauvelin laughed. The query sounded choked and hoarse, whether through horror, excitement or mere impatient curiosity it were impossible to say.

"Well!" he retorted with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "I was too far up stream to see anything and Vailly saw nothing either. But he heard. So did others who happened to be on the shore close by."

"What did they hear?"

"The hammering," replied Chauvelin curtly, "when the portholes were knocked open to let in the flood of water. And the screams and yells of five and twenty drowning priests."

"Not one of them escaped, I suppose?"

"Not one."

Once more Chauvelin laughed. He had a way of laughing – just like that – in a peculiar mirthless, derisive manner, as if with joy at another man's discomfiture, at another's material or moral downfall. There is only one language in the world which has a word to express that type of mirth; the word is *Schadenfreude*.

It was Chauvelin's turn to triumph now. He had distinctly perceived the signs of an inward shudder which had gone right through Martin-Roget's spine: he had also perceived through the man's bent shoulders, his silence, his rigidity that his soul was filled with horror at the story of that abominable crime which he

– Chauvelin – had so blandly retailed and that he was afraid to show the horror which he felt. And the man who is afraid can never climb the ladder of success above the man who is fearless.

IV

There was silence in the low raftered room for awhile: silence only broken by the crackling and sizzling of damp logs in the hearth, and the tap-tapping of a loosely fastened shutter which sounded weird and ghoulish like the knocking of ghosts against the window-frame. Martin-Roget bending still closer to the fire knew that Chauvelin was watching him and that Chauvelin had triumphed, for – despite failure, despite humiliation and disgrace – that man's heart and will had never softened: he had remained as merciless, as fanatical, as before and still looked upon every sign of pity and humanity for a victim of that bloody revolution – which was his child, the thing of his creation, yet worshipped by him, its creator – as a crime against patriotism and against the Republic.

And Martin-Roget fought within himself lest something he might say or do, a look, a gesture should give the other man an indication that the horrible account of a hideous crime perpetrated against twenty-five defenceless men had roused a feeling of unspeakable horror in his heart. That was the punishment of these callous makers of a ruthless revolution – that was their hell upon earth, that they were doomed to hate and

to fear one another; every man feeling that the other's hand was up against him as it had been against law and order, against the guilty and the innocent, the rebel and the defenceless; every man knowing that the other was always there on the alert, ready to pounce like a beast of prey upon any victim – friend, comrade, brother – who came within reach of his hand.

Like many men stronger than himself, Pierre Adet – or Martin-Roget as he now called himself – had been drawn into the vortex of bloodshed and of tyranny out of which now he no longer had the power to extricate himself. Nor had he any wish to extricate himself. He had too many past wrongs to avenge, too much injustice on the part of Fate and Circumstance to make good, to wish to draw back now that a newly-found power had been placed in the hands of men such as he through the revolt of an entire people. The sickening sense of horror which a moment ago had caused him to shudder and to turn away in loathing from Chauvelin was only like the feeble flicker of a light before it wholly dies down – the light of something purer, early lessons of childhood, former ideals, earlier aspirations, now smothered beneath the passions of revenge and of hate.

And he would not give Chauvelin the satisfaction of seeing him wince. He was himself ashamed of his own weakness. He had deliberately thrown in his lot with these men and he was determined not to fall a victim to their denunciations and to their jealousies. So now he made a great effort to pull himself together, to bring back before his mind those memory-pictures of past

tyranny and oppression which had effectually killed all sense of pity in his heart, and it was in a tone of perfect indifference which gave no loophole to Chauvelin's sneers that he asked after awhile:

"And was citizen Carrier altogether pleased with the result of his patriotic efforts?"

"Oh, quite!" replied the other. "He has no one's orders to take. He is proconsul – virtual dictator in Nantes: and he has vowed that he will purge the city from all save its most deserving citizens. The cargo of priests was followed by one of malefactors, night-birds, cut-throats and such like. That is where Carrier's patriotism shines out in all its glory. It is not only priests and aristos, you see – other miscreants are treated with equal fairness."

"Yes! I see he is quite impartial," remarked Martin-Roget coolly.

"Quite," retorted Chauvelin, as he once more sat down in the ingle-nook. And, leaning his elbows upon his knees he looked straight and deliberately into the other man's face, and added slowly: "You will have no cause to complain of Carrier's want of patriotism when you hand over your bag of birds to him."

This time Martin-Roget had obviously winced, and Chauvelin had the satisfaction of seeing that his thrust had gone home: though Martin-Roget's face was in shadow, there was something now in his whole attitude, in the clasping and unclasping of his large, square hands which indicated that the man was labouring under the stress of a violent emotion. In spite of this he managed

to say quite coolly: "What do you mean exactly by that, citizen Chauvelin?"

"Oh!" replied the other, "you know well enough what I mean – I am no fool, what?.. or the Revolution would have no use for me. If after my many failures she still commands my services and employs me to keep my eyes and ears open, it is because she knows that she can count on me. I do keep my eyes and ears open, citizen Adet or Martin-Roget, whatever you like to call yourself, and also my mind – and I have a way of putting two and two together to make four. There are few people in Nantes who do not know that old Jean Adet, the miller, was hanged four years ago, because his son Pierre had taken part in some kind of open revolt against the tyranny of the ci-devant duc de Kernogan, and was not there to take his punishment himself. I knew old Jean Adet... I was on the Place du Bouffay at Nantes when he was hanged..."

But already Martin-Roget had jumped to his feet with a muttered blasphemy.

"Have done, man," he said roughly, "have done!" And he started pacing up and down the narrow room like a caged panther, snarling and showing his teeth, whilst his rough, toil-worn hands quivered with the desire to clutch an unseen enemy by the throat and to squeeze the life out of him. "Think you," he added hoarsely, "that I need reminding of that?"

"No. I do not think that, citizen," replied Chauvelin calmly, "I only desired to warn you."

"Warn me? Of what?"

Nervous, agitated, restless, Martin-Roget had once more gone back to his seat: his hands were trembling as he held them up mechanically to the blaze and his face was the colour of lead. In contrast with his restlessness Chauvelin appeared the more calm and bland.

"Why should you wish to warn me?" asked the other querulously, but with an attempt at his former over-bearing manner. "What are my affairs to you – what do you know about them?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing, citizen Martin-Roget," replied Chauvelin pleasantly, "I was only indulging the fancy I spoke to you about just now of putting two and two together in order to make four. The chartering of a smuggler's craft – aristos on board her – her ostensible destination Holland – her real objective Le Croisic... Le Croisic is now the port for Nantes and we don't bring aristos into Nantes these days for the object of providing them with a feather-bed and a competence, what?"

"And," retorted Martin-Roget quietly, "if your surmises are correct, citizen Chauvelin, what then?"

"Oh, nothing!" replied the other indifferently. "Only ... take care, citizen ... that is all."

"Take care of what?"

"Of the man who brought me, Chauvelin, to ruin and disgrace."

"Oh! I have heard of that legend before now," said Martin-

Roget with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. "The man they call the Scarlet Pimpernel you mean?"

"Why, yes!"

"What have I to do with him?"

"I don't know. But remember that I myself have twice been after that man here in England; that twice he slipped through my fingers when I thought I held him so tightly that he could not possibly escape and that twice in consequence I was brought to humiliation and to shame. I am a marked man now – the guillotine will soon claim me for her future use. Your affairs, citizen, are no concern of mine, but I have marked that Scarlet Pimpernel for mine own. I won't have any blunderings on your part give him yet another triumph over us all."

Once more Martin-Roget swore one of his favourite oaths.

"By Satan and all his brood, man," he cried in a passion of fury, "have done with this interference. Have done, I say. I have nothing to do, I tell you, with your *satané* Scarlet Pimpernel. My concern is with..."

"With the duc de Kernogan," broke in Chauvelin calmly, "and with his daughter; I know that well enough. You want to be even with them over the murder of your father. I know that too. All that is your affair. But beware, I tell you. To begin with, the secrecy of your identity is absolutely essential to the success of your plan. What?"

"Of course it is. But..."

"But nevertheless, your identity is known to the most astute,

the keenest enemy of the Republic."

"Impossible," asserted Martin-Roget hotly.

"The duc de Kernogan..."

"Bah! He had never the slightest suspicion of me. Think you his High and Mightiness in those far-off days ever looked twice at a village lad so that he would know him again four years later? I came into this country as an *émigré* stowed away in a smuggler's ship like a bundle of contraband goods. I have papers to prove that my name is Martin-Roget and that I am a banker from Brest. The worthy bishop of Brest – denounced to the Committee of Public Safety for treason against the Republic – was given his life and a safe conduct into Spain on the condition that he gave me – Martin-Roget – letters of personal introduction to various high-born *émigrés* in Holland, in Germany and in England. Armed with these I am invulnerable. I have been presented to His Royal Highness the Regent, and to the élite of English society in Bath. I am the friend of M. le duc de Kernogan now and the accredited suitor for his daughter's hand."

"His daughter!" broke in Chauvelin with a sneer, and his pale, keen eyes had in them a spark of malicious mockery.

Martin-Roget made no immediate retort to the sneer. A curious hot flush had spread over his forehead and his ears, leaving his cheeks wan and livid.

"What about the daughter?" reiterated Chauvelin.

"Yvonne de Kernogan has never seen Pierre Adet the miller's son," replied the other curtly. "She is now the affianced wife of

Martin-Roget the millionaire banker of Brest. To-night I shall persuade M. le duc to allow my marriage with his daughter to take place within the week. I shall plead pressing business in Holland and my desire that my wife shall accompany me thither. The duke will consent and Yvonne de Kernogan will not be consulted. The day after my wedding I shall be on board the *Hollandia* with my wife and father-in-law, and together we will be on our way to Nantes where Carrier will deal with them both."

"You are quite satisfied that this plan of yours is known to no one, that no one at the present moment is aware of the fact that Pierre Adet, the miller's son, and Martin-Roget, banker of Brest, are one and the same?"

"Quite satisfied," replied Martin-Roget emphatically.

"Very well, then, let me tell you this, citizen," rejoined Chauvelin slowly and deliberately, "that in spite of what you say I am as convinced as that I am here, alive, that your real identity will be known – if it is not known already – to a gentleman who is at this present moment in Bath, and who is known to you, to me, to the whole of France as the Scarlet Pimpernel."

Martin-Roget laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Impossible!" he retorted. "Pierre Adet no longer exists ... he never existed ... much... Anyhow, he ceased to be on that stormy day in September, 1789. Unless your pet enemy is a wizard he cannot know."

"There is nothing that my pet enemy – as you call him – cannot ferret out if he has a mind to. Beware of him, citizen Martin-

Roget. Beware, I tell you."

"How can I," laughed the other contemptuously, "if I don't know who he is?"

"If you did," retorted Chauvelin, "it wouldn't help you ... much. But beware of every man you don't know; beware of every stranger you meet; trust no one; above all, follow no one. He is there where you least expect him under a disguise you would scarcely dream of."

"Tell me who he is then – since you know him – so that I may duly beware of him."

"No," rejoined Chauvelin with the same slow deliberation, "I will not tell you who he is. Knowledge in this case would be a very dangerous thing."

"Dangerous? To whom?"

"To yourself probably. To me and to the Republic most undoubtedly. No! I will not tell you who the Scarlet Pimpernel is. But take my advice, citizen Martin-Roget," he added emphatically, "go back to Paris or to Nantes and strive there to serve your country rather than run your head into a noose by meddling with things here in England, and running after your own schemes of revenge."

"My own schemes of revenge!" exclaimed Martin-Roget with a hoarse cry that was like a snarl... It seemed as if he wanted to say something more, but that the words choked him even before they reached his lips. The hot flush died down from his forehead and his face was once more the colour of lead. He took up a log

from the corner of the hearth and threw it with a savage, defiant gesture into the fire.

Somewhere in the house a clock struck nine.

V

Martin-Roget waited until the last echo of the gong had died away, then he said very slowly and very quietly:

"Forgo my own schemes of revenge? Can you even remotely guess, citizen Chauvelin, what it would mean to a man of my temperament and of my calibre to give up that for which I have toiled and striven for the past four years? Think of what I was on that day when a conglomeration of adverse circumstances turned our proposed expedition against the château de Kernogan into a disaster for our village lads, and a triumph for the duc. I was knocked down and crushed all but to death by the wheels of Mlle. de Kernogan's coach. I managed to crawl in the mud and the cold and the rain, on my hands and knees, hurt, bleeding, half dead, as far as the presbytery of Vertou where the *curé* kept me hidden at risk of his own life for two days until I was able to crawl farther away out of sight. The *curé* did not know, I did not know then of the devilish revenge which the duc de Kernogan meant to wreak against my father. The news reached me when it was all over and I had worked my way to Paris with the few sous in my pocket which that good *curé* had given me, earning bed and bread as I went along. I was an ignorant lout when I arrived in Paris. I

had been one of the ci-devant Kernogan's labourers – his chattel, what? – little better or somewhat worse off than a slave. There I heard that my father had been foully murdered – hung for a crime which I was supposed to have committed, for which I had not even been tried. Then the change in me began. For four years I starved in a garret, toiling like a galley-slave with my hands and muscles by day and at my books by night. And what am I now? I have worked at books, at philosophy, at science: I am a man of education. I can talk and discuss with the best of those d – d aristos who flaunt their caprices and their mincing manners in the face of the outraged democracy of two continents. I speak English – almost like a native – and Danish and German too. I can quote English poets and criticise M. de Voltaire. I am an aristo, what? For this I have worked, citizen Chauvelin – day and night – oh! those nights! how I have slaved to make myself what I now am! And all for the one object – the sole object without which existence would have been absolutely unendurable. That object guided me, helped me to bear and to toil, it cheered and comforted me! To be even one day with the duc de Kernogan and with his daughter! to be their master! to hold them at my mercy!.. to destroy or pardon as I choose!.. to be the arbiter of their fate!.. I have worked for four years: now my goal is in sight, and you talk glibly of forgoing my own schemes of revenge! Believe me, citizen Chauvelin," he concluded, "it would be easier for me to hold my right hand into those flames until it hath burned to a cinder than to forgo the hope of that vengeance which has eaten

into my soul. It would hurt much less."

He had spoken thus at great length, but with extraordinary restraint. Never once did he raise his voice or indulge in gesture. He spoke in even, monotonous tones, like one who is reciting a lesson; and he sat straight in front of the fire, his elbow on his knee, his chin resting in his hand and his eyes fixed upon the flames.

Chauvelin had listened in perfect silence. The scorn, the resentful anger, the ill-concealed envy of the fallen man for the successful upstart had died out of his glance. Martin-Roget's story, the intensity of feeling betrayed in that absolute, outward calm had caused a chord of sympathy to vibrate in the other's atrophied heart. How well he understood that vibrant passion of hate, that longing to exact an eye for an eye, an outrage for an outrage! Was not his own life given over now to just such a longing? – a mad aching desire to be even once with that hated enemy, that maddening, mocking, elusive Scarlet Pimpernel who had fooled and baffled him so often?

VI

Some few moments had gone by since Martin-Roget's harsh, monotonous voice had ceased to echo through the low raftered room: silence had fallen between the two men – there was indeed nothing more to say; the one had unburthened his over-full heart and the other had understood. They were of a truth made to

understand one another, and the silence between them betokened sympathy.

Around them all was still, the stillness of a mist-laden night; in the house no one stirred: the shutter even had ceased to creak; only the crackling of the wood fire broke that silence which soon became oppressive.

Martin-Roget was the first to rouse himself from this trance-like state wherein memory was holding such ruthless sway: he brought his hands sharply down on his knees, turned to look for a moment on his companion, gave a short laugh and finally rose, saying briskly the while:

"And now, citizen, I shall have to bid you adieu and make my way back to Bath. The nags have had the rest they needed and I cannot spend the night here."

He went to the door and opening it called a loud "Hallo, there!"

The same woman who had waited on him on his arrival came slowly down the stairs in response.

"The man with the horses," commanded Martin-Roget peremptorily. "Tell him I'll be ready in two minutes."

He returned to the room and proceeded to struggle into his heavy coat, Chauvelin as before making no attempt to help him. He sat once more huddled up in the ingle-nook hugging his elbows with his thin white hands. There was a smile half scornful, but not wholly dissatisfied around his bloodless lips. When Martin-Roget was ready to go he called out quietly after

him:

"The *Hollandia* remember! At Portishead on the last day of the month. Captain K U Y P E R."

"Quite right," replied Martin-Roget laconically. "I'm not like to forget."

He then picked up his hat and riding whip and went out.

VII

Outside in the porch he found the woman bending over the recumbent figure of his guide.

"He be azleep, Mounzeer," she said placidly, "fast azleep, I do believe."

"Asleep?" cried Martin-Roget roughly, "we'll soon see about waking him up."

He gave the man a violent kick with the toe of his boot. The man groaned, stretched himself, turned over and rubbed his eyes. The light of the swinging lanthorn showed him the wrathful face of his employer. He struggled to his feet very quickly after that.

"Stir yourself, man," cried Martin-Roget savagely, as he gripped the fellow by the shoulder and gave him a vigorous shaking. "Bring the horses along now, and don't keep me waiting, or there'll be trouble."

"All right, Mounzeer, all right," muttered the man placidly, as he shook himself free from the uncomfortable clutch on his shoulder and leisurely made his way out of the porch.

"Haven't you got a boy or a man who can give that lout a hand with those *sacré* horses?" queried Martin-Roget impatiently. "He hardly knows a horse's head from its tail."

"No, zir, I've no one to-night," replied the woman gently. "My man and my son they be gone down to Watchet to 'elp with the cargo and the pack-'orzes. They won't be 'ere neither till after midnight. But," she added more cheerfully, "I can straighten a saddle if you want it."

"That's all right then – but..."

He paused suddenly, for a loud cry of "Hallo! Well! I'm ..." rang through the night from the direction of the rear of the house. The cry expressed both surprise and dismay.

"What the – is it?" called Martin-Roget loudly in response.

"The 'orzes!"

"What about them?"

To this there was no reply, and with a savage oath and calling to the woman to show him the way Martin-Roget ran out in the direction whence had come the cry of dismay. He fell straight into the arms of his guide, who promptly set up another cry, more dismal, more expressive of bewilderment than the first.

"They be gone," he shouted excitedly.

"Who have gone?" queried the Frenchman.

"The 'orzes!"

"The horses? What in – do you mean?"

"The 'orzes have gone, Mounzeer. There was no door to the ztables and they be gone."

"You're a fool," growled Martin-Roget, who of a truth had not taken in as yet the full significance of the man's jerky sentences. "Horses don't walk out of the stables like that. They can't have done if you tied them up properly."

"I didn't tie them up," protested the man. "I didn't know 'ow to tie the beastly nags up, and there was no one to 'elp me. I didn't think they'd walk out like that."

"Well! if they're gone you'll have to go and get them back somehow, that's all," said Martin-Roget, whose temper by now was beyond his control, and who was quite ready to give the lout a furious thrashing.

"Get them back, Mounzeer," wailed the man, "'ow can I? In the dark, too. Besides, if I did come nose to nose wi' 'em I shouldn't know 'ow to get 'em. Would you, Mounzeer?" he added with bland impertinence.

"I shall know how to lay you out, you *satané* idiot," growled Martin-Roget, "if I have to spend the night in this hole."

He strode on in the darkness in the direction where a little glimmer of light showed the entrance to a wide barn which obviously was used as a rough stabling. He stumbled through a yard and over a miscellaneous lot of rubbish. It was hardly possible to see one's hands before one's eyes in the darkness and the fog. The woman followed him, offering consolation in the shape of a seat in the coffee-room whereon to pass the night, for indeed she had no bed to spare, and the man from Chelwood brought up the rear – still ejaculating cries of astonishment rather

than distress.

"You are that careless, man!" the woman admonished him placidly, "and I give you a lanthorn and all for to look after your 'orzes properly."

"But you didn't give me a 'and for to tie 'em up in their stalls, and give 'em their feed. Drat 'em! I 'ate 'orzes and all to do with 'em."

"Didn't you give 'em the feed I give you for 'em then?"

"No, I didn't. Think you I'd go into one o' them narrow stalls and get kicked for my pains."

"Then they was 'ungry, pore things," she concluded, "and went out after the 'ay what's just outside. I don't know 'ow you'll ever get 'em back in this fog."

There was indeed no doubt that the nags had made their way out of the stables, in that irresponsible fashion peculiar to animals, and that they had gone astray in the dark. There certainly was no sound in the night to denote their presence anywhere near.

"We'll get 'em all right in the morning," remarked the woman with her exasperating placidity.

"To-morrow morning!" exclaimed Martin-Roget in a passion of fury. "And what the d – l am I going to do in the meanwhile?"

The woman reiterated her offers of a seat by the fire in the coffee-room.

"The men won't mind ye, zir," she said, "heaps of 'em are Frenchies like yourself, and I'll tell 'em you ain't a spying on 'em."

"It's no more than five mile to Chelwood," said the man blandly, "and maybe you get a better shakedown there."

"A five-mile tramp," growled Martin-Roget, whose wrath seemed to have spent itself before the hopelessness of his situation, "in this fog and gloom, and knee-deep in mud... There'll be a sovereign for you, woman," he added curtly, "if you can give me a clean bed for the night."

The woman hesitated for a second or two.

"Well! a zovereign is tempting, zir," she said at last. "You shall 'ave my son's bed. I know 'e'd rather 'ave the zovereign if 'e was ever zo tired. This way, zir," she added, as she once more turned toward the house, "mind them 'urdles there."

"And where am I goin' to zleep?" called the man from Chelwood after the two retreating figures.

"I'll look after the man for you, zir," said the woman; "for a matter of a shillin' 'e can sleep in the coffee-room, and I'll give 'im 'is breakfast too."

"Not one farthing will I pay for the idiot," retorted Martin-Roget savagely. "Let him look after himself."

He had once more reached the porch. Without another word, and not heeding the protests and curses of the unfortunate man whom he had left standing shelterless in the middle of the yard, he pushed open the front door of the house and once more found himself in the passage outside the coffee-room.

But the woman had turned back a little before she followed her guest into the house, and she called out to the man in the

darkness:

"You may zleep in any of them outhouses and welcome, and zure there'll be a bit o' porridge for ye in the mornin'!"

"Think ye I'll stop," came in a furious growl out of the gloom, "and conduct that d – d frog eater back to Chelwood? No fear. Five miles ain't nothin' to me, and 'e can keep the miserable shillin' 'e'd 'ave give me for my pains. Let 'im get 'is 'orzes back 'izelf and get to Chelwood as best 'e can. I'm off, and you can tell 'im zo from me. It'll make 'im sleep all the better, I reckon."

The woman was obviously not of a disposition that would ever argue a matter of this sort out. She had done her best, she reckoned, both for master and man, and if they chose to quarrel between themselves that was their business and not hers.

So she quietly went into the house again; barred and bolted the door, and finding the stranger still waiting for her in the passage she conducted him to a tiny room on the floor above.

"My son's room, Mounzeer," she said; "I 'ope as 'ow ye'll be comfortable."

"It will do all right," assented Martin-Roget. "Is 'the Captain' sleeping in the house to-night?" he added as with an afterthought.

"Only in the coffee-room, Mounzeer. I couldn't give 'im a bed. 'The Captain' will be leaving with the pack 'orzes a couple of hours before dawn. Shall I tell 'im you be 'ere."

"No, no," he replied promptly. "Don't tell him anything. I don't want to see him again: and he'll be gone before I'm awake, I reckon."

"That 'e will, zir, most like. Good-night, zir."

"Good-night. And – mind – that lout gets the two horses back again for my use in the morning. I shall have to make my way to Chelwood as early as may be."

"Aye, aye, zir," assented the woman placidly. It were no use, she thought, to upset the Mounzeer's temper once more by telling him that his guide had decamped. Time enough in the morning, when she would be less busy.

"And my John can see 'im as far as Chelwood," she thought to herself as she finally closed the door on the stranger and made her way slowly down the creaking stairs.

CHAPTER III

THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS

I

The sigh of satisfaction was quite unmistakable.

It could be heard from end to end, from corner to corner of the building. It sounded above the din of the orchestra who had just attacked with vigour the opening bars of a schottische, above the brouhaha of moving dancers and the frou-frou of skirts: it travelled from the small octagon hall, through the central salon to the tea-room, the ball-room and the card-room: it reverberated from the gallery in the ball-room to the maids' gallery: it distracted the ladies from their gossip and the gentlemen from their cards.

It was a universal, heartfelt "Ah!" of intense and pleasurable satisfaction.

Sir Percy Blakeney and his lady had just arrived. It was close on midnight, and the ball had positively languished. What was a ball without the presence of Sir Percy? His Royal Highness too had been expected earlier than this. But it was not thought that he would come at all, despite his promise, if the spoilt pet of Bath society remained unaccountably absent; and the Assembly

Rooms had worn an air of woe even in the face of the gaily dressed throng which filled every vast room in its remotest angle.

But now Sir Percy Blakeney had arrived, just before the clocks had struck midnight, and exactly one minute before His Royal Highness drove up himself from the Royal Apartments. Lady Blakeney was looking more radiant and beautiful than ever before, so everyone remarked, when a few moments later she appeared in the crowded ball-room on the arm of His Royal Highness and closely followed by my lord Anthony Dewhurst and by Sir Percy himself, who had the young Duchess of Flintshire on his arm.

"What do you mean, you incorrigible rogue," her Grace was saying with playful severity to her cavalier, "by coming so late to the ball? Another two minutes and you would have arrived after His Royal Highness himself: and how would you have justified such solecism, I would like to know."

"By swearing that thoughts of your Grace had completely addled my poor brain," he retorted gaily, "and that in the mental contemplation of such charms I forgot time, place, social duties, everything."

"Even the homage due to truth," she laughed. "Cannot you for once in your life be serious, Sir Percy?"

"Impossible, dear lady, whilst your dainty hand rests upon mine arm."

II

It was not often that His Royal Highness graced Bath with his presence, and the occasion was made the excuse for quite exceptional gaiety and brilliancy. The new fashions of this memorable year of 1793 had defied the declaration of war and filtrated through from Paris: London milliners had not been backward in taking the hint, and though most of the more starchy dowagers obstinately adhered to the pre-war fashions – the huge hooped skirts, stiff stomachers, pointed waists, voluminous panniers and monumental head erections – the young and smart matrons were everywhere to be seen in the new gracefully flowing skirts innocent of steel constructions, the high waist line, the pouter pigeon-like draperies over their pretty bosoms.

Her Grace of Flintshire looked ravishing with her curly fair hair entirely free from powder, and Lady Betty Draitune's waist seemed to be nestling under her arm-pits. Of course Lady Blakeney wore the very latest thing in striped silks and gossamer-like muslin and lace, and it was hard to enumerate all the pretty débutantes and young brides who fluttered about the Assembly Rooms this night.

And gliding through that motley throng, bright-plumaged like a swarm of butterflies, there were a few figures dressed in sober blacks and greys – the *émigrés* over from France – men, women, young girls and gilded youth from out that seething cauldron of

revolutionary France – who had shaken the dust of that rampant demagogism from off their buckled shoes, taking away with them little else but their lives. Mostly chary of speech, grave in their demeanour, bearing upon their wan faces traces of that horror which had seized them when they saw all the traditions of their past tottering around them, the proletariat whom they had despised turning against them with all the fury of caged beasts let loose, their kindred and friends massacred, their King and Queen murdered. The shelter and security which hospitable England had extended to them, had not altogether removed from their hearts the awful sense of terror and of gloom.

Many of them had come to Bath because the more genial climate of the West of England consoled them for the inclemencies of London's fogs. Received with open arms and with that lavish hospitality which the refugees and the oppressed had already learned to look for in England, they had gradually allowed themselves to be drawn into the fashionable life of the gay little city. The Comtesse de Tournai was here and her daughter, Lady Ffoulkes, Sir Andrew's charming and happy bride, and M. Paul Déroulède and his wife – beautiful Juliette Déroulède with the strange, haunted look in her large eyes, as of one who has looked closely on death; and M. le duc de Kernogan with his exquisite daughter, whose pretty air of seriousness and of repose sat so quaintly upon her young face. But every one remarked as soon as M. le duc entered the rooms that M. Martin-Roget was not in attendance upon Mademoiselle,

which was quite against the order of things; also that M. le duc appeared to keep a more sharp eye than usual upon his daughter in consequence, and that he asked somewhat anxiously if milor Anthony Dewhurst was in the room, and looked obviously relieved when the reply was in the negative.

At which trifling incident every one who was in the know smiled and whispered, for M. le duc made it no secret that he favoured his own compatriot's suit for Mademoiselle Yvonne's hand rather than that of my lord Tony – which – as old Euclid has it – is absurd.

III

But with the arrival of the royal party M. de Kernogan's troubles began. To begin with, though M. Martin-Roget had not arrived, my lord Tony undoubtedly had. He had come in, in the wake of Lady Blakeney, but very soon he began wandering round the room obviously in search of some one. Immediately there appeared to be quite a conspiracy among the young folk in the ball-room to keep both Lord Tony's and Mlle. Yvonne's movements hidden from the prying eyes of M. le duc: and anon His Royal Highness, after a comprehensive survey of the ball-room and a few gracious words to his more intimate circle, wandered away to the card-room, and as luck would have it he claimed M. le duc de Kernogan for a partner at faro.

Now M. le duc was a courtier of the old régime: to have

disobeyed the royal summons would in his eyes have been nothing short of a crime. He followed the royal party to the card-room, and on his way thither had one gleam of comfort in that he saw Lady Blakeney sitting on a sofa in the octagon hall engaged in conversation with his daughter, whilst Lord Anthony Dewhurst was nowhere in sight.

However, the gleam of comfort was very brief, for less than a quarter of an hour after he had sat down at His Highness' table, Lady Blakeney came into the card-room and stood thereafter for some little while close beside the Prince's chair. The next hour after that was one of special martyrdom for the anxious father, for he knew that his daughter was in all probability sitting out in a specially secluded corner in the company of my lord Tony.

If only Martin-Roget were here!

IV

Martin-Roget with the eagle eyes and the airs of an accredited suitor would surely have intervened when my lord Tony in the face of the whole brilliant assembly in the ball-room, drew Mlle. de Kernogan into the seclusion of the recess underneath the gallery.

My lord Tony was never very glib of tongue. That peculiar dignified shyness which is one of the chief characteristics of well-bred Englishmen caused him to be tongue-tied when he had most to say. It was just with gesture and an appealing pressure of his

hand upon her arm that he persuaded Yvonne de Kernogan to sit down beside him on the sofa in the remotest and darkest corner of the recess, and there she remained beside him silent and grave for a moment or two, and stole timid glances from time to time through the veil of her lashes at the finely-chiselled, expressive face of her young English lover.

He was pining to put a question to her, and so great was his excitement that his tongue refused him service, and she, knowing what was hovering on his lips, would not help him out, but a humorous twinkle in her dark eyes, and a faint smile round her lips lit up the habitual seriousness of her young face.

"Mademoiselle ..." he managed to stammer at last. "Mademoiselle Yvonne ... you have seen Lady Blakeney?"

"Yes," she replied demurely, "I have seen Lady Blakeney."

"And ... and ... she told you?"

"Yes. Lady Blakeney told me many things."

"She told you that ... that... In God's name, Mademoiselle Yvonne," he added desperately, "do help me out – it is cruel to tease me! Can't you see that I'm nearly crazy with anxiety?"

Then she looked up at him, her dark eyes glowing and brilliant, her face shining with the light of a great tenderness.

"Nay, milor," she said earnestly, "I had no wish to tease you. But you will own 'tis a grave and serious step which Lady Blakeney suggested that I should take. I have had no time to think ... as yet."

"But there is no time for thinking, Mademoiselle Yvonne," he

said naïvely. "If you will consent... Oh! you will consent, will you not?" he pleaded.

She made no immediate reply, but gradually her hand which rested upon the sofa stole nearer and then nearer to his; and with a quiver of exquisite happiness his hand closed upon hers. The tips of his fingers touched the smooth warm palm and poor Lord Tony had to close his eyes for a moment as his sense of superlative ecstasy threatened to make him faint. Slowly he lifted that soft white hand to his lips.

"Upon my word, Yvonne," he said with quiet fervour, "you will never have cause to regret that you have trusted me."

"I know that well, milor," she replied demurely.

She settled down a shade or two closer to him still.

They were now like two birds in a cosy nest – secluded from the rest of the assembly, who appeared to them like dream-figures flitting in some other world that had nothing to do with their happiness. The strains of the orchestra who had struck the measure of the first figure of a contredanse sounded like fairy-music, distant, unreal in their ears. Only their love was real, their joy in one another's company, their hands clasped closely together!

"Tell me," she said after awhile, "how it all came about. It is all so terribly sudden ... so exquisitely sudden. I was prepared of course ... but not so soon ... and certainly not to-night. Tell me just how it happened."

She spoke English quite fluently, with just a charming slight

accent, which he thought the most adorable thing he had ever heard.

"You see, dear heart," he replied, and there was a quiver of intense feeling in his voice as he spoke, "there is a man who not only is the friend whom I love best in all the world, but is also the one whom I trust absolutely, more than myself. Two hours ago he sent for me and told me that grave danger threatened you – threatened our love and our happiness, and he begged me to urge you to consent to a secret marriage ... at once ... to-night."

"And you think this ... this friend knew?"

"I know," he replied earnestly, "that he knew, or he would not have spoken to me as he did. He knows that my whole life is in your exquisite hands – he knows that our happiness is somehow threatened by that man Martin-Roget. How he obtained that information I could not guess ... he had not the time or the inclination to tell me. I flew to make all arrangements for our marriage to-night and prayed to God – as I have never prayed in my life before – that you, dear heart, would deign to consent."

"How could I refuse when Lady Blakeney advised? She is the kindest and dearest friend I possess. She and your friend ought to know one another. Will you not tell me who he is?"

"I will present him to you, dear heart, as soon as we are married," he replied with awkward evasiveness. Then suddenly he exclaimed with boyish enthusiasm: "I can't believe it! I can't believe it! It is the most extraordinary thing in the world..."

"What is that, milor?" she asked.

"That you should have cared for me at all. For of course you must care, or you wouldn't be sitting here with me now ... you would not have consented ... would you?"

"You know that I do care, milor," she said in her grave quiet way. "How could it be otherwise?"

"But I am so stupid and so slow," he said naïvely. "Why! look at me now. My heart is simply bursting with all that I want to say to you, but I just can't find the words, and I do nothing but talk rubbish and feel how you must despise me."

Once more that humorous little smile played for a moment round Yvonne de Kernogan's serious mouth. She didn't say anything just then, but her delicate fingers gave his hand an expressive squeeze.

"You are not frightened?" he asked abruptly.

"Frightened? Of what?" she rejoined.

"At the step you are going to take?"

"Would I take it," she retorted gently, "if I had any misgivings?"

"Oh! if you had... Do you know that even now ..." he continued clumsily and haltingly, "now that I have realised just what it will mean to have you ... and just what it would mean to me, God help me – if I were to lose you ... well!.. that even now I would rather go through that hell than that you should feel the least bit doubtful or unhappy about it all."

Again she smiled, gently, tenderly up into his eager, boyish face.

"The only unhappiness," she said gravely, "that could ever overtake me in the future would be parting from you, milor."

"Oh! God bless you for that, my dear! God bless you for that! But for pity's sake turn your dear eyes away from me or I vow I shall go crazy with joy. Men do go crazy with joy sometimes, you know, and I feel that in another moment I shall stand up and shout at the top of my voice to all the people in the room that within the next few hours the loveliest girl in all the world is going to be my wife."

"She certainly won't be that, if you do shout it at the top of your voice, milor, for father would hear you and there would be an end to our beautiful adventure."

"It will be a beautiful adventure, won't it?" he sighed with unconcealed ecstasy.

"So beautiful, my dear lord," she replied with gentle earnestness, "so perfect, in fact, that I am almost afraid something must happen presently to upset it all."

"Nothing can happen," he assured her. "M. Martin-Roget is not here, and His Royal Highness is even now monopolising M. le duc de Kernogan so that he cannot get away."

"Your friend must be very clever to manipulate so many strings on our behalf!"

"It is long past midnight now, sweetheart," he said with sudden irrelevance.

"Yes, I know. I have been watching the time: and I have already thought everything out for the best. I very often go home

from balls and routs in the company of Lady Ffoulkes and sleep in her house those nights. Father is always quite satisfied, when I do that, and to-night he will be doubly satisfied feeling that I shall be taken away from your society. Lady Ffoulkes is in the secret, of course, so Lady Blakeney told me, and she will be ready for me in a few minutes now: she'll take me home with her and there I will change my dress and rest for awhile, waiting for the happy hour. She will come to the church with me and then ... oh then! Oh! my dear milor!" she added suddenly with a deep sigh whilst her whole face became irradiated with a light of intense happiness, "as you say it is the most wonderful thing in all the world – this – our beautiful adventure together."

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